

Sen. Boxer plans briefing on train, truck exhaust

Press-Enterprise

August 10, 2007

By Duane W. Gang

Sen. Barbara Boxer will hold a congressional field briefing in the Inland region this fall to address emissions from trains and trucks, a chief contributor to the region's poor air quality, her office said Thursday.

The briefing comes at the request of San Bernardino County Supervisor Gary Ovitt, who asked Boxer, D-Calif., this week to take testimony on air-quality issues facing the two-county region.

"We feel something positive can happen as a result," said Ovitt, president of the Southern California Association of Governments. "We need the Environmental Protection Agency working for our benefit."

South Coast Air Quality Management District officials have called the region's air quality an emergency. Health studies have blamed air pollution for as many as 5,400 premature deaths and 2,400 hospitalizations each year.

Much of the most harmful pollution comes from trucks, trains, ships and airplanes used to transport an increasing volume of cargo throughout Southern California.

On Thursday, Boxer, chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, held a hearing in San Pedro on pollution from diesel-powered cargo ships.

Boxer is a sponsor of the Marine Vessel Emissions Reduction Act aimed at curbing pollution around the nation's ports.

Ovitt said he wants Boxer to sponsor similar legislation focusing on trains and trucks. He said railroads and the trucking industry should be required to use cleaner-burning diesel engines and fuel.

Local governments face a 2015 deadline to clean up diesel soot and other tiny particles known to cause cancer, heart disease and stunted lung development in children. The region's air pollution regulators have little jurisdiction, however, over major sources such as trains, trucks and cars. The federal government must step in, said Ovitt, a South Coast air district board member.

Boxer will hold an Inland briefing during a fall congressional recess, although a date has not been set.

"She wants to involve the key officials and people that can speak to the issue," Bettina Poirier, Boxer's staff director, said by telephone Thursday.